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ABSTRACT

This paper presents findings of a study that investigated educational change within two innovative schools experiencing financial crisis. Data were derived from interviews with 14 educators (principals and teachers) and from observations of school board meetings. The two schools were: (1) the Team Academy, a nongraded K-6 school; and (2) the Opportunity Alternative High School, a nontraditional school for at-risk students. The schools were receiving $25,000 in change funds annually from Ohio Venture Capital 5-year grants. An operating levy defeat and a community committee's recommendations threatened to close both schools. The program's focus on improving teaching and learning was seriously hindered by lowered school morale; parent, student, and staff uncertainties about the future; lack of community knowledge and appreciation; and bureaucratic procedures and lay directives that overpowered educational expertise. District procedures and the financial crisis replaced the goals for educational change and student learning. (Contains 28 references.) (LMI)

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Abstract

This qualitative case study investigates educational change within two innovative schools experiencing district financial crisis. Successfully implementing and maintaining innovations for four to five years, Team Academy Non-graded K-6 and Opportunity Alternative High School for At-risk Students receive $25,000 in change funds annually from Ohio Venture Capital five-year Grants. An operating levy defeat and a community committee's recommendations have threatened to close both schools. Interviews of teachers and principals and observations of Board of Education and schools provide the data for examining the impact of decreased operational funds upon their change programs. Lowered school morale, future uncertainties for staff, students, and parents; lack of community knowledge, understanding, and appreciation; bureaucratic procedure and lay directives overpowering educational expertise seriously hindered their programs' improvement affecting the teaching and learning for all students. Decreased operational funds were found to have a critical negative impact on the continuation of successful, democratic educational change.

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Impact of Decreased Operational Funds on Educational Change in an Ohio School District

Purpose

This qualitative case study investigates the impact of decreased operational funds upon established educational change or innovations successfully benefitting students. The principals and a sample of teachers working at Team Academy and Opportunity Alternative High School were interviewed and observed along with the prior and concurrent activities and policies of the Steeltown Board of Education to examine the impact of the defeat of a local operational levy upon the two schools' significant educational change that had been successfully implemented and maintained for four and five years respectively. The two schools had gained state and national recognition and were receiving $25,000 annually from Ohio Venture Capital five-year change funds Grants, and, yet, district budget cuts and recommendations from a community Buildings Cost-Effectiveness Committee threatened their continuation.

The Factors of Educational Change

How does the failure of a sizable operating levy in Steeltown City School District affect the change process in two innovative schools? For this study, educational change is defined as initiation, implementation, and maintenance of improvements and innovations designed to facilitate success for all students. Factors supporting educational change include: (1) knowledge and skills for increased professionalism and shared-leadership; (2) skills and respect for interdependence, teamwork, communication, and site-based management; (3) shared-vision focused on high expectations for staff and students and skills of self-monitoring and assessment of students and programs. Factors often hindering educational change include: (4) unstable, inadequate funding; (5) bureaucratic structure; and (6) maintenance of the social norms or resistance to change.

How will the teachers and principals perceive that these factors for improving teaching and learning in Opportunity Alternative High School and Team Academy are affected by the district's financial crisis? What are the perceptions of the teachers and principals concerning the operating budget cuts?

The Focused Research Questions

The focused research questions became: (1) What is the impact of decreased operational funds on maintaining and continuously developing the two innovative programs? How are they progressing this year and what are the educators' plans for the future? (2) How has the school district's financial crisis and the school district leaders' response to crisis affected the educators' daily behaviors and attitudes? (3) How do the educators describe the financial crisis affecting their students and their parents? (4) What are the educators' reactions to educational directives from lay-persons--the Buildings Cost-Effectiveness Committee and the Steeltown Board of Education--that affect the maintenance and continuous development of their innovative programs?

Theoretical Framework

A democratic society depends upon a deliberate and systematic education to prepare all members for participation (Dewey, 1944). The "machine" metaphor with its compartmentalized procedures and triangular management hierarchy, is giving way to the "brain" paradigm which realizes life as complex, unpredictable, interconnected, more heterarchical, and mutually causal (Covey, 1989; Morgan, 1986; Schwartz and Ogilvy, 1979; Senge, 1990). The prevalent top-down management theory governing public education is being challenged by researchers who support the concept that innovation and creative thinking begins in the classroom (Louis and Miles, 1990; Fullan, 1993; Fuhrman, 1993; Newmann, 1993; Astuto, Clark, Read, McGree, and Fernandez, 1994). Educational change requires the coherent policy structure of state legislation and district and school practices (Fuhrman, 1994, Louis and Miles, 1990). Site-based management or self-governance must be based upon the shared-understanding of improved teaching and learning grounded in a societal consensus of educational results. Without a curricular consensus as the basis for improvement, a clear accountability defining the successful strategies and their costs is difficult. Skills of collaborative program management and interdependency must be developed; a shared-vision must evolve. Real power and leadership must be shared with teachers to increase professional knowledge and skills benefitting students, increasing self-assessment, and monitoring of students and programs (Odden, 1991; Fulton, 1993, 1994; Wohlstetter, 1993; Carr and Kemmis, 1986; Louis and Miles, 1990; Fullan, 1993).

Funding is needed for change (Louis and Miles, 1990; Fulton, 1993). In Ohio the Blue Ribbon Schools are located most heavily in the three more wealthy counties (Ohio Dept. of Educ., 1990, 1993). When national recognition programs are reported, the funding issue is often not addressed, and 70% of the recognized schools are above their state averages in their funding (Corcoran and Wilson, 1986, 1987). In 1990, increases in educational funding were marked for reform, while basic daily operating needs of schools were neglected (Verstegan, 1994). Most American schools are struggling with low operational budgets that prohibit the conditions for educational improvement: little money for staff development, research and program development, reassignment of teachers for curriculum and instruction effectiveness, and class sizes too large for teacher-student work teams. Money is not invested in the worst problems (Astuto et al., 1994; Joyce, Wolf, Calhoun, 1993; Louis and Miles, 1990). Decisions concerning school finances must go beyond the economic focus of the bottom dollar and examine the relationship between benefits and costs of improved democratic education (Odden, 1994; Fulton, 1994).

Methodology of a Qualitative Study

Site Selection: Team Academy and Opportunity Alternative High School had designed and successfully implemented state-recognized, innovative programs to meet the complex learning requirements of their students. These programs were seriously threatened and the schools' daily operations were affected by the financial crisis in the Steeltown City School District.

Selection and Number of Participants: Fourteen educators, including the initial and current principals of both buildings were interviewed. The principals were interviewed first and asked to suggest staff who might have the clearest understanding and might best represent the perceptions of the others. Twelve of the fourteen educators interviewed were among those who originally opened their innovative schools in 1990 and 1991, respectively.

Observations and Semi-Structured Interviews: I observed the Board of Education meetings for eighteen months, recording, analyzing, and transcribing data studying the change process in the district before holding semi-structured interviews concerning the funding crisis. I asked the principals and teachers at the two schools open-ended questions in forty to ninety minute interviews, also recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. Thirty-nine topics emerged and evolved into seven themes.

Thematic analysis of the educators' perceptions produced answers or six findings concerning the research questions.

Trustworthiness: A saturation point was reached when no new information could be obtained from additional interviews. I went back five months later to obtain verification of my analysis of the informants' perceptions. They read the themes and samples of the writing and agreed that the data description spoke for them even more poignantly in August after another levy defeat.

Analysis: Answers to the Research Questions--Educator's Perceptions

The perceptions of the teachers and principals concerning the operating funds crisis provided the seven themes. The answers to the research questions emerged from their interviews.

Theme 1: Lowered morale, stress, and future uncertainties negatively affected teachers, students, and parents.

Theme 2: Self-survival concerns increased isolation and jealousy and decreased teamwork and communication.

Theme 3: Educators' innovative efforts were not supported by reductions in: building availability and maintenance; instructional materials and supplies; district services, and support, including adjustment to new leadership.

Theme 4: "The community and district do not understand us or our students." As a result bureaucratic structure and procedures replaced their autonomous consensus building necessary for educational improvement.

Theme 5: Educational change based upon "all children can learn" was hindered by the lay Buildings Cost-Effectiveness Committee and the Board of Education's economics of efficiency and individual competition and achievement.

Theme 6: Venture Capital Grant change funds did not protect the innovative programs or the educators' political power during the financial crisis. The district and community's lack of appreciation and operational funds resources supporting educational improvement discouraged educators' incentive to create.

Theme 7: Decreased operational funds crisis stifled the district-wide commitment for continuing educational change and refocused educators away from trust-based interconnected collaborative organizational behavior and back to self-preserving bureaucratic procedures.

Interpretation of the Seven Themes of Educators' Perceptions

Financially Threatened Educational Change

After two emergency operating levies failed in November 1994, the new superintendent and the Board of Education implemented Phase I and II for reducing the district's operational budget. The reductions included: early after-school building closings; reduced custodial staff; severe cuts in supplies; fewer new instructional materials; reduced high school bus transportation; all postage and communication to parents and the community, including grade reports; the public relations person; superintendent's grants to the schools to promote educational improvement; all district recognition programs and awards; up-dating of technology and their service agreements; spring extracurricular activities; and others. Still to be decided was the proposed Phase III reductions recommended by the superintendent's appointed Buildings Cost-Effectiveness Committee. Those possibilities included the closing of buildings, elimination of programs, and the reduction of courses and staff. The Buildings Cost-Effectiveness Committee recommended seven priorities for Phase III, listed within the top three recommendations were the closing of Team and Opportunity, the Venture Capital schools. As an alternative they suggested that Opportunity's program be severely reduced, removed from its specially purchased building, and be set up in much smaller quarters in the auto tech shop at Steeltown High School.

I have studied the informants' or educators' contributions within a broader view of relevant district policy development from eighteen months of observing the Steeltown Board of Education and the community economic issues as expressed in the newspapers when inclusion adds to the understanding of the research issue. The overlapping themes are the amalgamation of the educators' discussions, their behaviors, and emotions during the interviews and observations concerning the research questions. They are connected and build from one another and answer the research questions.

Research Question 1 and 3 and Educators' Answers:

The educators' perceived that lowered morale, stress, and future uncertainties were impacts of the decreased operational funds negatively affecting themselves, their students, and their parents. Those negative effects hindered their present progress and future plans of maintaining and continuously

developing their innovative educational programs. Because educators in the innovative schools were negatively affected by the district budget reductions and threats of job losses and school closings, self-survival concerns increased isolation and jealousy among the staff and decreased their vital change factors of teamwork and communication which had enabled them to manage their innovative programs creatively and effectively.

The negative impacts of decreased operational funds nullified any positive benefits resulting from the financial crisis. The issue of powerful, encompassing bureaucracy emerged from the data. The prevailing bureaucracy occurs, not only in the hierarchical organization of public education, but also in the daily compartmentalized thinking of community members and educators. Schroeder (1992, p. 115) explains Weber's understanding that "bureaucracy is among those social structures which are hardest to destroy...[it] is practically indestructible" (Weber, 1968, p. 987).

Lowered morale was the most significant effect upon the educators and their students due to the levy failure, the resulting operational budget cuts, and recommendations of the new superintendent's Buildings Cost-Effectiveness Committee. "We are going no where faster." "We're just sort of running from place to place and not taking the time to do all our stuff together." "Monday is the first time in three months when I walked into school and I didn't feel like turning around and walking back out because I didn't want to face another day of it." "We've stopped dreaming...it's a deadening." "There has been a return to traditions." With lowered morale, the total environment or climate became depressed, deadened. Less spirit meant less educational change. Reacting, rather than proacting, was regressive and blocked progressive change serving children and the district.

During the interviews, the participants remained positive, including little criticism. At the end, when the tape recorder was off, the descriptive statements came out. Sometimes a single sentence exploded into existence: "This is my arena, and I should be able to speak out." "With positive, consistent support, I would consider staying here and teaching as long as I was successful in bringing students and science together." An administrator said, "The funding problem just eats at me constantly!" As the dialogues illustrated, low morale was no small factor. Senge (1995) suggests:

> A large percentage of people enter this profession with a high sense of personal purpose. It is converted into a liability, because within a few years they become extraordinarily cynical... scratch the surface of a cynic, and you'll find a frustrated idealist....Education is standing in a gold mine. (1995, p.22)

The low morale, producing wide-spread cynicism and despair, also holds the potential for increased professionalism, Senge's "gold mine" of possibilities. Low morale is not frequently found in the literature. It is not significant within the bureaucratic paradigm. State and district coherent policy commitment for evolving educational change within a more heterarchical, collaborative paradigm will be necessary before personal professional cultivation can bring such change about (Apple and Beane, 1995, p. 105; Senge, 1995, p. 22).

Stress, abundant at both schools, was obvious to an educator visiting Team Academy. A former principal said, "The teachers have worked so hard and for so long; they are exhausted. They are hurt and disillusioned. They have lost their focus on their goals." The threat of program dilution, building closings, reassignment of positions, and loss of jobs had produced an atmosphere of future uncertainty. The educators refocused efforts towards personal survival and turned inward. They lost their positive, expectant view on the future. The tremendous waste of energies should have been focused on children's learning.

These teachers were exceptionally committed. They had been developing individualized curriculum daily. They were dealing with severe problems which the other schools had ignored. They were caring for young human beings just beginning to value themselves again, and, yet, the educators received little caring and nurturing from their own local professional colleagues and business-community members. "A technically collaborative organization is particularly effective when guided by the ethos of caring community," offered Newmann (1993, p. 5).

Self-survival concerns increased isolation and jealousy and decreased teamwork and communication. "The teachers were no longer as willing to offer each other a helping hand to get through a difficult situation." Maybe that energy generously offered before was needed now for self-survival. The educators had not abandoned their hopes for change focused on children, but the decreased operational funds had stopped further progress. Signs of deterioration of their change programs included future staffing problems and the diminished integrity of their purpose due to a different student population and less collaboration. The over-burdened educators returned to traditionalism and isolation, forgetting change for improvement. Most of them communicated less and were spending less time on cooperative planning.

The real fear of not meeting the Venture Capital Grant requirements and losing their school, panicked the Opportunity educators into substituting compartmentalized, separate committees to decide school-wide activities for time-consuming group consensus discussions. Unified ownership was lost, and communication was weakened. People carried out individual tasks, and the shared-vision for their school was blurred. From the perspective of the teachers, the climate of the schools exhibited more possessiveness, isolation, competition, and jealousy, instead of consensus-building and teamwork so necessary for the fulfilling of their grant requirements and building for the future. Senge (1995) discusses:

> Most teachers feel oppressed trying to conform to all kinds of rules, goals and objectives, many of which they don't believe in. Teachers don't work together; there's very little sense of collective learning going on in most schools....enhancing the collective capacity of people to create and pursue overall visions. (1995, p.20)

Future uncertainties affected the students of Opportunity poignantly. They professed that they would not go to another school. As one teacher said, "This was their academic and economic salvation. All two hundred of them would be back out on the streets". I asked what would happen if they relocated the Opportunity Program within another high school setting. A university student-teacher supervisor working at Opportunity answered:

> The program would most likely fall apart. These kids need to be by themselves, to be considered special in some way. I don't think they will function well with the others. They will be mostly ostracized and probably drop out. Opportunity is rescuing some kids from jail, crime, giving them structure in their lives-, some social skills. (Feb. 1995)

The principal answered the same question:

> I think it would become a "your kids"--"my kids situation." Every time our kids did anything wrong, it would be "your kids did...." I don't believe you could get them to go to another school.

Students at both schools continually questioned their teachers, "Will I be here next year?" "Will this school be here next year?" "What's going to happen to us?" Behavior at the high school seemed worse, a greater problem than ever before. The educators' believed that they had been given unqualified students in order for the district to raise their enrollment numbers for validation of their alternative program. While the district was busy protecting the program, the protection device was seriously weakening it. The different and serious needs of their new students were not met through

their original program focus. No one, not the students, their teachers and parents, nor the community, was benefitting from this dilution of purpose.

The negative situation made Opportunity's educators look more positively upon a semi-break with the Steeltown district and linking with the county as security for their program's integrity. The alternative plan opened its enrollment and offered half of its available services to other county school students who would bring with them their state basic aid and local funds. Only the past principal mentioned that the county, also, must go for operational tax levies.

Future uncertainties at Team were slightly different from Opportunity's. The younger students were quite anxious, and their learning suffered many distractions which the teachers' sought to minimize. "Will we have our school next year?" "My little ones have always been here," said one teacher. "They don't want to leave." The students' uncertainties had to do with the future of the Gifted and Talented Educational (G.A.T.E.) program in addition to the future existence of their school. It had been suggested by district leaders at a Rotary Meeting, related one teacher, that if the levy failed, special subjects--physical education, music, art--elementary teachers might be eliminated.

Educators commented that the district's range of curriculum offerings may be providing adequately for the college-bound students, but may be seriously neglecting those not bound for higher education. This claim referred to the superintendent's recommendation that certain courses be cut and the Board's discussion, March 1995. Some teachers and their community acquaintances believed their children were not receiving certain essential, critical learning opportunities.

Future uncertainties posed questions for parents. The educators perceived that fifty percent of the Steeltown students went to college or technical schools. Some questioned that the other fifty percent, the non college-bound Steeltown students, might not be receiving the rich, broad, and relevant curriculum needed for their successful, future lives. Present and past parents of those under-served students could become an overwhelming number of negative voters. Such a situation was suggested. Educators in both schools added that changes to alleviate the imbalanced curriculum situation would be "upsetting the apple cart" and "taking care of some entrenched ideas."

More children, living in the changing demography of increasing social ills, could account for an increasing student population at Opportunity. Recognizing individual needs and addressing wide-spread

community problems, "upsetting the apple cart of entrenched practices," could be effectively blocked by closing down the two progressive schools. "Turning the at-risk students back out into the streets" could support the assumption that citizens are powerless to interrupt the increasing social ills, except to build more prisons (Astuto et al., 1994), to which the Ohio state budget testifies.

Parents at Team began sending in supplies of paper and glue sticks, planning additional fund raisers for computers and copying machine service agreements, and continuing their volunteering in the classroom, but many of them had the financial security enabling them to do that. At Opportunity many parents were poor. The Opportunity English teacher commented:

> When the fifteen reams of paper that I bought are gone, the students will have to provide their own, and that will be difficult for many of them.

One student explained how increased taxes would take away his mother's cigarette money, illustrating the impact taxes have on different socio-economic groups. Even the teenagers at Opportunity had a narrow, but practical understanding of the effects of taxation and how their landlords' would pass it on down to them, maybe, in even higher amounts than were necessary to cover the additional taxes. The Opportunity parents verbally praised and embraced the educators for what they had done for their children. They were genuinely grateful. A teacher said, "I believe they would vote for the levy if they knew their money would be used to keep Opportunity open." If we look at the other side of that coin, we may see the results of the curriculum dilemma, as another teacher had explained some parents' comments, "I'm not sure I like what the district is doing. What has it done for my kid?"

The energy for change was funneled into worrying about the present and the future. That worry was specific to the educators' classrooms and students and generalized to their families and the total district. The educators' loyalty to the district was beginning to weaken as they sensed little appreciation for their past efforts, and the real need to contemplate a different future.

Research Question 2 and Educators' Answers

Educators' innovative efforts were not supported by reductions in: building availability and maintenance; instructional materials and supplies; district services; and support, including adjustment to new leadership. The school district's financial crisis and school district leaders'

response to the crisis negatively affected the educators' daily behaviors and attitudes for educational improvement.

Actions of the Steeltown Board of Education and the school district leaders had limited services to the children and teachers. Fewer custodial services put a greater burden on the Team elementary teachers whose children had messy, hands-on school projects.

> Today, luckily, my room is swept. So tomorrow, it won't be swept, then I'll sweep it myself, because, I mean, it's a mess with these little kids.

Another teacher on the third floor at Opportunity who spent the last part of the interview stamping out ants behind her desk said:

> The floors aren't swept anymore. It seems I have had M & M's on the floor for three weeks now, and I refuse to pick them up. I noticed today, I have ants all over my floor back here. It's the tiny little things like that which are affecting us.

The early after school building closings had shortened and discouraged both schools' teacher team planning sessions.

> They want you to do well; they want you to be innovative; they want you to do your best; they want you to be a wonderful district, but you must close your doors at 4:00.

One thirty year veteran teacher said:

> I would be happy to work without the lights. That's no problem. We're supposed to be out of the building by 4:00. One night I stayed late to work, and they brought the Board Meeting over here! I thought, "How do I get out? When I see other teachers come in to the meeting I'm going to sneak out of here real quick!"

Limited high school busing hurt the poorer teenagers who did not have cars; attendance went down in the cold months. Some teachers responded by driving students to school. Reductions in the basic paper supply made individualized curriculum development more difficult for the educators at Team and Opportunity. Teachers were buying their instructional supplies. One bought fifteen reams of paper for the student newspaper. Courses such as "Intervention Math" were eliminated (Phases I and II, Budget Cuts, Board of Education, November 9, 1994).

The principal at Team wanted money for stipends to pay teachers for Saturday planning sessions. The teachers described the long hours they regularly spent during the week and on weekends, evaluating students' work and preparing lessons. A small stipend may be inappropriate for justifying additional

weekend schedules, without subtracting from the educators' weekly responsibilities. National Education Commission on Time and Learning found:

> If the schedule does not allow teachers to meet during the regular school day, they may become worn down and captives of their schedules - "prisoners of time." (Hargreaves, 1995, p. 17)

The "prisoners of time" is an important issue, especially when the community does not openly value the teachers present committed efforts with financial support. The lack of time in the building as a result of the early closings reduced collaboration and effective utilization of human resources. The Consortium for Policy Research in Education evaluating the National Science foundation (NSF)'s State Systemic Initiatives for improving the instruction of Math and Science suggested policy was needed to design time for collaboration:

> While new formats, such as networks and collaboration are emerging, little progress has been made in changing state policy affecting...compensation or instructional time that would support such formats and give teachers time to participate on a continuing basis. (CPRE, 1995, p.9)

District leadership and community did not seem to understand that the educators need their workplaces clean. Improving the physical appearance of the workplace is a first step change-agents take to build pride and enthusiasm for improvement (Louis and Miles, 1990; Apple and Beane, 1995; Kozol, 1991). This was "a step backwards," commented one teacher quoting the new superintendent who had said, "We may have to take a step backwards."

Shortened consensus meetings and after-school work periods, plus the additional room-cleaning duties, left little time for the Team Academy educators to wrestle with the key to their continued improving this year, the development of useful authentic assessment of their students, their programs, and themselves. Schools lacked paper and other supplies, a critical need for individualization of curriculum. Less time and more duties, no paper and more challenging individual student problems, disrespect replacing national recognition, poorer student attendance due to limited high school bus transportation, and less security and support from the new leadership brought the educators' to a point of whispering and a state of being "punished."

> It is very frustrating that you are rewarded on one hand for trying something new and finding new directions, and then turned around and slapped because you did it.

Research Question 4 and Educators' Answers:

The educators reacted to the educational directives from lay persons--the Board of Education and the Buildings Cost-Effectiveness Committee--with disillusion and disbelief. "They don't understand us or our students." Their educational change based upon "all children can learn," was hindered by the economics of efficiency and individual competition and achievement. Their Venture Capital change funds Grants could not protect them or their political power during the decreased operational funds crisis. Both the lay directorship and the unstable, inadequate operational funds set about to replace their autonomous consensus building and their creative innovations with the district's bureaucratic structure. The change educators and their unique successful curriculum and learning strategies developed within trust-based collaborative organizational behavior were refocused on self-preserving bureaucratic procedures. The financial crisis stifled the district-wide skill building and commitment for continuing educational change serving children.

District bureaucratic procedures replaced autonomous consensus building The innovative schools' principals described the situation within the context of the teachers' behavior. Wohlstetter and Mohrman (1994, p. 3) explain a characteristic of actively restructuring schools. "Principals were more facilitators and managers of change than instructional leaders. Teachers often took the lead in the areas of curriculum and instruction." During the interviews, the principals did not discuss the evolving future of their innovative programs beyond survival. While they said they desired a return to the real purpose of their schools, they were "obsessed with the funding crisis." They did not choose to organize a coalition of staff, parents, and students to defend their programs directly at the Board of Education meetings, but decided upon actions less controversial. The new principal at Opportunity "struggled long and hard with this particular dilemma," explained the former principal.

The educators at both schools had thought that the Buildings Cost-Effectiveness Committee would look at the educational benefits their programs were providing for their students, but the Buildings Cost-Effectiveness Committee recommended that the two change schools be closed or reduced. The educators believed that their diligent efforts for the last five years would be valued. Opportunity educators had facilitated the graduation of thirty-three out of thirty-six seniors, all passing the Ninth Grade Proficiency Test. The remaining three girls had narrowly missed passing the math section.

Opportunity was succeeding with its at-risk population; the former drop-out students were being given another "chance for academic and economic survival." The staff had written proposals and received grants worth $130,000 in school year 1993-94. The students and educators affectionately called Opportunity Alternative High School "home."

"During the first year of Team Academy, the sixth grade standardized test scores were low, but they had steadily improved. In 1993-94, Team students placed among the top three schools in the district, in all subject areas and age groupings," explained the principal. Their children were contented and happy in the non-competitive, hands-on, continuous progress environment. Their parents demonstrated their satisfaction by volunteering and providing strong support for the school's needs. The teachers had been involved in numerous workshops around the state, spreading what they had learned by teaching and encouraging others, and hosted many visitors weekly.

The educators were dumbfounded that none of these accomplishments counted with the community and business people. None of the committee members visited the schools or talked to any teachers, except to those seated on the committee. The Buildings Cost-Effectiveness Committee had questioned the representative teacher form Opportunity as she described their program. She related their attitude toward their at-risk students:

> The committee said,"Why don't you just kick them out! Kick them out if they don't do what they are supposed to do, if they don't come to school."

Both change teachers had made great effort to increase the educational knowledge of the lay people on the committee concerning special education law and other current information, but they became frustrated as they realized that amount and depth of professional educational knowledge cannot be learned quickly. The community and business members were ill-prepared to handle such heavy responsibilities. The educators perceived that lay decision-makers, other district personnel, and the community members did not understand them or the focus of their innovative programs. The lay recommendations were negatively affecting the two innovative schools.

> There is a community ignorance; children that we care about and have worked so hard to put on a road to success are too expensive to continue educating.

All the educators interviewed agreed that the real financial problem rested with the Ohio State Legislators who needed to change the unfair, unstable public education funding policies. They believed that the legislators, although sincere about funding schools, could not have sufficient knowledge about contemporary public education and students' needs. They needed to come back to the classroom and study the situation. Sykes (1990) informs us that "while authority and regard are important to teachers, the major problem for most is the lack of resources supporting their professional efforts" (Elmore, 1990, p. 74). Before the 1994-95 levy failure, both Opportunity and Team's educators had district administrators' support for their initiation and implementation of change. As the district administrator co-chairman said (March, 1995):

> It just doesn't make sense....We've worked so hard to build these programs up, and now we have to work doubly hard to dismantle them.

The threats of closings along with other budget cuts, significantly decreased the progress of the change programs, minimized professional growth, and reduced essential collegiality. The educators realized that program survival depended singularly upon its economic efficiency. The Board of Education had stressed "high expectations were needed to encourage students to achieve." The educators perceived that important required elements for successful learning must undergird their "high expectations" set for students and the resources for those required elements must be supplied by the community and district.

The former superintendent had led the district toward becoming a "learning community" through staff development, community leadership training with the Chamber of Commerce, and training for site-based management. Such collaboration was steadily improving services for students bringing about increased achievement, more parent involvement, and interested, involved children. He had also worked to educate the Board in the change process. In 1993-94, the Steeltown Board of Education was enthusiastic and proud of the district's accomplishments, speaking at an Ohio School Boards Association Annual conference and helping other school districts' Board members begin educational change. Yet, just one year later, the Board made budget reductions that undermined its educational improvement process. The state bureaucratic structure placed the power for final decisions in the hands of the lay

Board of Education, not in the hands of professional educators who had training and knowledge concerning what was needed to enable "all children to learn."

The Board of Education held itself accountable to the community for using its money wisely, but failed to realize the vital connection of adequate finances and consistent, uninterrupted educational opportunities for all children. The educators perceived the lay decision-makers did not comprehend the need for different strategies and approaches to teach effectively all children, including the students who had been damaged or ignored by their community's state of affairs or poor family circumstances--matters over which children had little control. A teacher explained, "These are the forgotten kids." The invisibility of the at-risk students' problems were illustrated by a Board member:

> Everyone should work harder. You had to pull yourself up by your own bootstraps. Only those willing to work deserved to succeed, If we set our expectations high enough, they will achieve.

When the board members hesitated to heed the treasurer's and the former superintendent's fiscal warnings and postponed a levy until November 1994, they did not address the issue of asking the public for the necessary funds to support their schools. Previously, they had borrowed money to cover cash flow problems and were considering the Ohio Loan Fund, a serious and controlling program that reduced districts to bare minimum standards while requiring them to pay commercial interest rates on loans with already insufficient tax dollars.

One teacher perceived that the ability to pass levies was a vital point in evaluating a superintendent. The former superintendent had said, "The funding eats at me constantly." He had spent his first three years working to obtain financial stability in the district. The president of the Board commented that although two and three-year superintendency terms had become common in Ohio, they had been fortunate to have the former superintendent's leadership for seven years. The Board stating its belief in the community's faith in the district, had chosen to "low key" the funding issues and their November 1994 levy campaign (Steeltown Journal, Oct. 30, 1994, p.3). The 17.25 mills levy was defeated.

Illustrating the power of the lay Board of Education to close down their program, a Team teacher explained, "We were so worried about what the Board would decide to do. Would they close us? They were so "iffy" about it." The teachers commented on the Board's discussion of courses to be cut. The

district seemed to provide curriculum appropriate for college bound students, but over half their students planned to enter the work force directly out of high school. The funding issue had become more important to the Board of Education than campaigning for the support of its district's continuing educational improvement.

The failed levies illustrated the community's lack of understanding and support for the schools. As a result of the November levy failure, the new superintendent commissioned the Buildings Cost-Effectiveness Committee, made up of community people, business, parents, and educators, to recommend $500,000 Phase III budget cuts. One Opportunity teacher expressed her belief:

> The committee was a superfluous body that gave a stamp of approval to something that had already been decided. The conservative Board hires the superintendent who forms the committee.

The educators seemed to have little influence on the committee's recommendations and explained the secrecy of the Committee's final prioritized recommendations. The committee's role description did not allow them to build consensus and provide input into the district budget cutting debates that affected their futures. They felt unappreciated as systems procedures disregarded their prior consensus activities and began to alter the focus of their educational programs. The educators perceived this misunderstanding as a contradiction of social values and the lack of professional information and expertise. They said:

> We are not being judged by the successful results of our educational program but by the economic bottom dollar, by how much each teacher is paid per student.

Two wide-spread social values conflicted with the educators' professional objectives for facilitating successful learning in all their students. Individualistic achievement and competition of marketplace utilitarianism oversimplify the social situation of a diverse urban school district and assume all children can participate with equitable opportunities in the Steeltown schools. A "level playing field" exists only in a narrowed vision that ignores the existence of numerous children of the community who bring their problems into the schools daily impacting their success.

The second contradictory social value encompasses the strict economic frame of capitalism. While economics can positively stimulate and motivate creativity, perseverance, and invention, when

taken to extremes, it may value only efficiency and competition and disregard people. Public education is not a profit-making business; it is a people-tax-supported entity whose purpose is to educate all the community's children successfully. The teachers had focused upon developing curriculum to serve needs of all their students. The community's economics of increased efficiency and individualism influenced the levy outcome and district budget and ignored the equity issue of public education facilitating learning in all children.

Businesses in Steeltown, in 1990, pledged to support the schools in the "Decade of the Nineties" and signed the Blueprint for the Future. Joint leadership training from both the school district and businesses allowed a two-way flow of people, communications, and skill building from all sectors of the community establishing the basis for a "learning community." Business's support had been vital to levy passage in 1990, but in 1995, business cooperation seemed to be lacking. The C.E.O. of Founder Steel, called the "smiling barracuda," made a newspaper statement three days before the February levy offering to pay half the cost of an outside financial effectiveness study of the district. District administrators, teachers, and Board members thought that his statement negatively influenced the levy's results. Later, the Steeltown Chamber of Commerce matched his suggestion with finances for the other half of the study. The businesses hired a consultant, and the study was started in July 1995. Within their "Efficiency and Effectiveness Study" survey given to the district personnel, one question asked: "Do you think Opportunity Alternative High School is an efficient building?" No other district school was singled out in the survey. A Board member commented (May 1995):

> I don't know why, just a year ago, the business community was patting us on the back, was telling us how good we were doing, and now we can't do anything right, as far as the business community is concerned. It just doesn't make sense.

The business thinking based upon efficiency and profits is not the same as that of educators' commitment to serving all children. Giving opinions and useful input is quite different from allowing a predominantly non-educator community-business group to recommend that educational change serving students who need a variety of structures and strategies in which to learn is not necessary or affordable. Hargreaves (1995) discusses a paradox of restructuring:

> Stronger orientation to the future creates greater nostalgia for the past. Complexity and uncertainty are leading many people to long for golden ages of traditional subjects, basic skills, and singular values in a world of clear moral certainties. (p. 15)

This paradox may explain some of the resistance to the two highly visible innovative schools in the Steeltown community. Fullan (1991) suggests that it is important to build and nurture alliances among various community groups, parents, educators, and others directly involved with the change process (Mirel, 1994 p. 483). Previously developed political alliances might have influenced the Buildings Cost-Effectiveness Committee's recommendations. Hargreaves (1995) suggests, "Collaboration also furthers the development of a common professional language, so that teachers can resist the pervasive business vocabulary..." (1995, p. 17). Educators may be more effective in forming alliances and effectively sharing educational knowledge within the community if more language commonality were developed in the educator-community discourse.

The Buildings Cost-Effectiveness Committee was told to make recommendations to cut $500,000 and judged the innovative schools and their programs by efficient and economic standards (Phase III, Board of Education meeting, November 28, 1994). The committee did not evaluate or appreciate educational change by examining its benefits for students and the long term health of their community. They said that closing Team would save $795,000, closing Opportunity would save $885,000 (Board of Education meeting, February 27, 1995). The teachers were concerned about the accuracy of the figures, especially as most of Team's teachers had tenure and would retain positions in the district, and both buildings were to be kept open for other uses.

> They didn't consider that when we give the students the skills, there is a good chance that they can make it on their own in society. I really believed that they were considering that until I talked to a person, and then I realized that this is a dollar sign thing. If we can keep that program and have half as many teachers doing it, in half the space, then move this program to something smaller [old auto shop at Steeltown High School, saving $400,000 the first year and $700,000 the second year]. The people on the committee were not even considering our Venture Capital Grant.

The teachers on the committee were amazed at the negative feelings of community members and business people. They had become "more negative toward the change schools at the end." The committee did not have the educational expertise to understand and value the work of the educators and their need for encouragement. The literature discusses funds for educational change, but under represents and underestimates the relation of daily operational funds to educational change. Funds for change are supplementary and must be undergirded by stable, adequate operational funds to support initiation,

implementation, and maintenance of long-term educational innovative curriculum development for students. Teachers believed that their Venture Capital Grants would protect them during the district financial crisis, but they did not. The turnover in superintendents negated "the safeguards the former superintendent had built into the system for their programs," explained one teacher.

What would happen when their grant funds were gone? The grant money supported Opportunity's parent involvement program and Team's study on authentic assessments. The change funds allowed educators to go to professional conferences, visit other schools, and work with experts. Other grants were available, but they required well-written proposals, and the teachers had writing little since the crisis began. This year there was a lack of completed grant proposals. The teachers believed their funds for special programs and curriculum innovations would dwindle fast without new grants, but the spirit to acquire them was gone.

The district neglected recognition and praise, another budget cut. Most of the educators would have been grateful for a few kind words. They needed reassurance from the district administrators and the community-business members, but it was not forthcoming.

> As teachers, we know to praise, but as administrators, we don't simply tell people, "You did really well." Maybe what's hurting the district is this overall feeling from the public, "You've done a crappy job." Managers, especially in times like this, have to come out of their offices and say, "You are doing a fine job. Thank you for taking care of that for me."

By not respecting educational expertise, the district and community stifled the educators' incentive to create new financial resources. In addition to losing major autonomy in governing their own schools, the educators expressed that they had now, "lost their sense of free will," that everything had been determined for them. They were not even asked for input into decisions that concerned them.

> All we can do now is deal with it. We have lost our sense that "I am the government." The funding issue is really impeding our looking ahead, our planning for the future. People are focusing on minutia, like pizza parties, and not thinking about how we can do this better for kids.

Last year they were integrating curricula. They had community projects going. People were not doing that now. As a visitor to Team said, "They just seem stressed, stressed." They were not writing grant proposals. They were not collaborating to learn and implement more authentic assessment strategies and monitor themselves and their programs. "The biggest effect of the financial

crunch has been to stop people from dreaming," said one teacher. "That possibility really frightens me."

> Once we stop the dreaming in a place like Opportunity, we're dead in the water. When you look at a kid and think, "You don't have it. Why bother with this one. I can't make a difference." As a teacher, "I'm out of here as soon as possible," then our program is dead.

A few educators saw the need to become more politically active. The former principals had also urged them to gather a coalition of parents and go to the Board, but neither school did. Another teacher expressed, "People have lost their belief in the system. This is my arena; I should be able to speak out."

The district's lack of skills and commitment for working within the structure of collaborative interconnectedness gave way to the bureaucratic structure in the face of the decreased operational funds crisis. The district leaders and educators needed to work together with the community for increased: teamwork, more professional knowledge and skills, shared-leadership, and responsible self-assessment and program monitoring aligned with the evolving shared-vision that "all children can learn." The opposing characteristics of the two organizational and relational paradigms cancelled the progress of the collaborative educational change when the district regressed to more bureaucratic structure and procedures. Concerning the dimensions of school-district relationships, Louis (1989) reports that bureaucratization is the presence of extensive rules and regulations governing the relationship. Engagement, the second dimension, is frequent interaction and communication, mutual coordination and influence, some shared goals and objectives. A negotiated high-engagement and low-bureaucratization is the more favorable relationship (Murphy & Hallinger, 1995, p. 160).

> Essentially, the picture is co-management, with coordination and joint planning enhanced through the development of consensus between staff members at all levels about desired goals for education. (Louis, 1989, p. 161)

Pascale (1990) presents the concept of the necessary balance of organizational authority in school restructuring:

> First, the overriding lesson is that school-district codevelopment [of restructuring] is an exercise in avoiding overcontrol on the one hand and chaos on the other. (Murphy & Hallinger, 1995, p. 160)

The educators explained that the change schools flourished under collaborative autonomy. The schools began through grant funds which essentially gave people license to have charter schools a part from the district. Educators' innovation, collaboration, state change funds grants, and district support, not traditional district and state policy, built successful programs for students. When Opportunity first came under district funding, the teachers began to experience more district policies and their autonomous consensus building was weakened.

The educators spoke of a district-wide malaise, a district-wide despair that wasn't there last year.

> Two years ago you could hear teachers say, "I could spend my whole working career in this building. I can see working here ten or fifteen years. In comparison to that today, with the funding crisis, people are sending out applications. People are talking about hiring possibilities. People are becoming negative.

The decreased operational funds crisis had refocused the educators toward more self-preserving procedures versus collaboration for students.

> The funding situation has given me the extra prod I need to get started on my masters degree. But you know, if something happens here, I'll just go somewhere else.

The educators were struggling with the critical professional requirement of increasing their skills in a variety of assessment instruments and strategies for reflecting upon and monitoring their progress for adjusting curriculum. The tremendous fiscal pressures on the educators had slowed or stopped their progress in assessment development. A Team teacher said:

> By the time we get finished with the organizational stuff, we don't have any more time in our meetings to get to assessment and kids.

A collective vision and commitment including improved learning for all the district's children was lacking. Such a vision for educational programming required proactive district policies and community operational funds support. Team and Opportunity's change programs were fragile, even though they had existed for five years. The State Systemic Initiative Report (1995) informs us that many citizens commonly do not believe or understand that most children are capable of learning much more than the present levels of public education demand of them.

> The status quo in public education should not be good enough for their children....The reformers have not achieved a degree of public understanding and support that is needed to secure

> commitments from local and state policymakers to sustain these initiatives. Therefore the reforms remain fragile and vulnerable..." (CPRE, RB-15-May 1995, p.9).

The State Systemic Initiatives researchers' findings include the necessary: policy alignment; upgraded curriculum and coherent reportable assessment; improved teacher training and continuous professional development; and the lasting coalition of educators, business leaders, and civic leaders with long-term agendas creating bipartisan support" (CRE, RB-15-May, 1995, p.9). Trust and support (Apple and Beane, 1995) two elements needed for deep-coping (Louis and Miles, 1990) with the risks and problems of courageous educational change were missing in this reactive atmosphere. The literature offers supporting examples in other innovative schools where counter-productive district leadership and Board of Education activity were damaging and severely challenged change educators (Apple and Beane, 1995). Traditional lay-directed procedures over-powering educational expertise may not be effective for children or society if they only maintain the social norms, the sataus quo, and do not address the current and future realities for children.

During this crisis people were reverting to familiar procedures. They began to reintroduce to students the traditional strategies, the very things that had contributed to their failures in the past past. The Opportunity educators believed the school district was increasing their student enrollment to protect and validate their program during the funding crisis. They were receiving a large number of severely behavioral handicapped (SBH) students from the middle schools. Their problems did not fit the objectives of the alternative program. The school became a less effective and a discouraging, disrupting environment for the qualified students. The chaos distressed the teachers.

> When you get new kids in here, it is like something has been taken from the others. It has been an upheaval, especially since we think we're getting dumped on by the middle schools. I think the student population would have been different if we hadn't had the funding crisis. Without the funding crisis I think the teachers would have worked more patiently with one another and the difficult students.

During the first four years, the traditional bells system had not operated at Opportunity. The new unqualified students had been so unruly that the teachers came to consensus on reinstating the bells. This decision caused another problem, the reintroduction of "tardiness," a predictable source of student-teacher confrontation. The consensus over the bells system had little positive effect when teachers had no authority over the larger issue, controlling the admission of a students for whom their

program was not designed to help. This year they had neglected to implement student government as they had done in the past. Therefore, the students' input for the solution of problems had been overlooked.

> Student Government had really helped kids take ownership of the building's problems in the past. I don't know why we don't have it this year.

The former principal of Opportunity talked about the initial admissions interview process. She had interviewed each individual student over a longer period of time, not possible this year when the new principal had received over a hundred students in one week. If the alternative high school opened up to the county, the educators believed they would have more say over the students admitted, but the teachers and the principals were not included on the planning procedures. They seemed to have little say about decisions, the details, or time lines. They would have to wait and see "what decision came down." Autonomy was gone.

Both Team and Opportunity had been through "the fear of change." One teacher explained:

> If we don't have opportunities to change and grow ourselves, our ideas become stagnant and die. People are scared and tired. People who began these schools with that sense of zeal and enthusiasm have been working hard, but they've slowly seen real progress over the last five years. Now there is turmoil. The funding is a constant ax over our heads affecting every decision we make.

The decreased operational funds crisis seems to have introduced a deep weariness in the innovative educators. They said:

> We are seeing a reintroduction of traditionalism into the schools, and our educational change designed to help kids learn is grinding to a rapid halt.

Conclusions

Finding 1: Decreased operational funds had a dramatic negative impact. Educators perceived that it did not support maintaining and improving their innovative educational programs serving their students. They saw lowered morale, stress, turmoil, and future uncertainties affecting teachers, students, and parents. They found that their self-survival concerns increased jealousy and isolation and decreased teamwork and communication, the organizational characteristics necessary for continuing educational innovation.

Finding 2: Successful democratic education serving all students was perceived as the goal of educational change. The educators perceived that lay people in the community and many district personnel did not understand the educational improvements or the students who needed them. The lay Board of Education and the Buildings Cost-Effectiveness Committee worked from the social values of economic efficiency and individual competition and achievement which often countered the beneficial teamwork, community, and innovative collaboration. Lay people lacked extensive educational knowledge needed for the decisions they were empowered to make.

Finding 3: Stable, adequate, equitable funding is vital for maintaining evolving educational change. The educators did not see their innovative efforts supported by operational budget reductions in building availability and maintenance; instructional materials and supplies; and district services and support, including adjustment to new leadership. Their innovative programs serving individual curriculum needs were threatened by decreased operational funds and the perception of community devaluation resulting in low morale, reduced collegiality, and blocked future change. While the Venture Capital change funds Grants protected parts of the innovative programs, the daily discouragements from the decreased operational budget and lack of community support demonstrated a societal value placing the financial crisis above educational success for students.

Finding 4: Increased professional development of public educators was understood as critical for facilitating evolving educational change. Decreased operational funds crisis weakened the district-wide commitment to educational change and refocused educators away from a trust-based interconnected, collaborative organizational behavior and back to the more self-preserving bureaucratic procedures. The district's skills, resources, and leadership in the change process were not advanced and established enough to carry them through the financial crisis. Critical skills of self-assessment and program monitoring, reflecting, and reporting had barely begun to be discussed.

Finding 5: The educators found a problem with minimally informed lay people--business, community, board members, legislators--directing complex evolving educational change. The educators realized lay decisions were based on economic values and clearly lacked educational knowledge. They did not encompass present social realities and the equitable serving of all students. Educators felt little comprehension of and appreciation for their committed professional efforts. The perception of community devaluation and the loss of political power discouraged the educators' incentive to create and maintain evolving educational change.

Finding 6: The educators' noted that bureaucratic structure and procedures discouraged collaborative consensus necessary for evolving educational change replacing their political voice and program autonomy. District procedures and the financial crisis became more important that evolving educational change producing long-term benefits for the students and the community. "An Efficient Balanced Budget" had replaced the former district motto: "All Students Can Learn."

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